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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
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P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY  
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEMAYEL DISTANCING HIMSELF FROM MARCH 14?

REF: BEIRUT 1638

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Former President and Kataeb head Amine Gemayel told the Ambassador and visiting NEA/ELA Office Director Nicole Champagne that March 14 would not develop a common platform by the coalition's January convention. At a November 20 meeting at Kataeb Headquarters, Gemayel emphasized the need to "maintain flexibility" in coalitions, platforms, and lists, and said publicizing independent candidates on March 14 lists "earlier than necessary" could damage their credentials as independents. The Ambassador stressed the need for March 14 unity to win the 2009 parliamentary elections.

¶2. (C) Gemayel also expressed concern regarding Sunni leader Saad Hariri and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt's recent meetings with Hizballah, stressing that he would not participate in any coalition platform granting concessions to Hizballah. Gemayel noted the importance of U.S. "pressure" on independent candidates and Armenian Tashnaq members to run with March 14 in the upcoming elections. Gemayel also described his plan for indirect talks between Israel and Lebanon to return to the terms of the 1949 Armistice Agreement. End summary.

MARCH 14 LISTS AND PLATFORM NOT ON THE HORIZON  
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¶3. (C) Former President and Kataeb head Amine Gemayel, meeting with the Ambassador and visiting NEA/ELA Office Director Nicole Champagne on November 20, the day before the second anniversary of Gemayel's son Pierre's assassination, was adamant that March 14 would not issue a unified platform or reveal an electoral list during the coalition's convention in January. Gemayel, accompanied by potential "independent" candidate in Ksarawan Sejean Azzi, accused March 14 Secretary General Fares Souaid of "running a private club" and failing to consult with March 14 political leaders before making statements that bind the coalition's various political entities to timelines and actions. Gemayel said "too many questions" remain in the selection of candidates and forming policies to lock March 14 into an announcement date.

¶4. (C) On publishing of unified March 14 candidate lists in January, Gemayel argued that announcing the inclusion of independents that early would "embarrass" the candidates and bring into question their credentials as independents. He argued that lists still need to be "flexible" to allow for "shifting alliances." He said lists should be announced locally, not at a unified party rally. (Note: Souaid told us separately the list will include 100 named candidates, leaving 28 seats for unnamed independents. End Note.)

¶5. (C) Gemayel also noted that independent candidates need to participate in the forming of March 14 electoral lists; he cited the possibility that potential Ksarawan independent Nemat Frem would refuse to participate on a March 14 list with a Lebanese Forces (LF) candidate -- judging the LF as unpalatable to his own electoral backers -- to show the fluidity of the selection process. He also noted the need to coordinate closely with independent Christian MP Michel Murr to form electoral lists in the Metn. Gemayel said Kataeb now is doing its homework -- "Homework with a capital H," he stressed -- and will bring its electoral lists to the media only on the party's timeline.

¶6. (C) Explaining his hesitation to announce a unified March 14 platform in January, Gemayel said he was unsure that he could accept any platform proposed by fellow March 14 leader Saad Hariri. Gemayel suspected that in recent meetings with Hizballah representatives, Hariri had agreed to certain stands, on Hizballah's weapons in particular, or political alliances and concessions that Gemayel's constituents would not support.

¶7. (C) Gemayel also expressed concern that Druze leader Walid Jumblatt was looking to make political inroads with Hizballah. Gemayel argued that any such deals with Hizballah would strengthen Christian opposition leader Michel Aoun by validating Hizballah and Aoun's alliance with the group. Gemayel noted several times that Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces had opposed the July 2008 cabinet declaration passage that justified Hizballah's maintaining an armed resistance.

¶8. (C) Citing again the need for "flexibility," Gemayel argued that March 14 political actors would make deals, assume platforms, and appoint candidates in their personal best interests; because their specific stances would at times diverge, March 14 leaders could not adopt a single strong platform. No national platform is possible unless Hariri and Jumblatt are "willing to go all the way" regarding Hizballah, he said. The Ambassador stressed the need to provide a clear message to the Lebanese population regarding what March 14 represents -- themes such as sovereignty of the state and full authority to the army for national defense. She noted the danger of March 14 continuing without a unified March 14 vision, particularly as the parliamentary elections are expected to be very close. The Ambassador emphasized that strong stands by March 14 in key swing districts will be crucial for electoral success. Gemayel offered that maybe a broad, vague coalition platform was a possibility, but then focused on his efforts to find a Kataeb party platform that appeals to the common voter.

#### TASHNAQ AND INDEPENDENTS NEED U.S. PUSH

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¶9. (C) Gemayel assessed that President Sleiman's "subtle" influence was necessary to encourage potential independent candidates, such as businessman Nemat Frem, to participate in elections. Gemayel said President Sleiman feared that any hint of his outward involvement in the political arena would damage the neutral position of the presidency. Gemayel said Sleiman, however, did want to quietly encourage independent candidates to participate is unlikely to make any strong public statements of support. Gemayel also stressed the importance of the U.S. in encouraging independent candidates to run and helping to push the Armenian Tashnaq party to the March 14 side. On Tashnaq, Gemayel said the party probably would stay with Aoun, hypothesizing that the close relationship of the Armenia-based international leader of the Tashnaq party to Iran could be the cause. (Note: In a

November 14 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief, Tashnaq leader Hagop Pakradunian, again avowed the Lebanese Tashnaq's complete independence from Iran. End Note.) Gemayel added that the strong ties between Lebanese Armenians and the large Armenian community in the U.S. could make U.S. pressure for Tashnaq to side with March 14 helpful.

#### INDIRECT TALKS WITH ISRAEL TO DISARM HIZBALLAH

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¶10. (C) Gemayel stressed Lebanon must regain Sheba'a Farms in order to remove Hizballah's pretext for carrying arms and to restore "domestic peace" to the country. To accomplish this, Gemayel proposed indirect talks between Lebanon and Israel. He stressed that such talks would not seek the establishment of a peace treaty but instead a return to the terms of the 1949 Armistice Agreement. (Note: The 1949 Armistice Agreement, signed by Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, ended the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and established armistice lines with Israel. End Note.) Gemayel opined that the Lebanese population would be amenable to indirect talks with Israel since the need for Lebanon to return to the Armistice terms is stipulated in Taif and has been voted on by the cabinet on several occasions. He said he had followed closely statements by Israeli politicians and assessed they would be willing to hold indirect negotiations. Gemayel also said Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had offered to mediate Lebanese-Israeli talks.

¶11. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question about the possibility of including such a move in the March 14 platform, Gemayel was certain many March 14 leaders would agree with his plan in principle. However, he said, Lebanese leaders lack courage for "unusual ideas" and may be reluctant to support a project that could draw criticism.

#### GEMAYEL'S PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL DIALOGUE

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¶12. (C) In Gemayel's view, "serious conversations" have not occurred at the September and November National Dialogue sessions. Further, setting the date for the next session on December 22, close to the Christmas holiday and the Islamic new year, and failing to set an agenda for the session, show that no serious dialogue will take place soon. He said Lebanese need first to agree on the definitions of concepts such as sovereignty and allegiance before they can agree on a national defense strategy to protect the country.

¶13. (C) Gemayel said that in the last Dialogue session, he proposed a defense strategy that he says was agreed upon by March 14. His strategy was based on the Swiss-model -- reserving the role of national protection for the army while acknowledging the importance of local participation in the defense of the nation -- but no further work has been done on forming a unified March 14 defense plan. Gemayel said the National Dialogue session -- which he likened to working to "keep a sick man alive" -- remained valuable as they kept communication lines open and provided an option other than street fighting to discuss differences.

¶14. (C) More broadly, Gemayel argued that Lebanon is currently operating in a "broken" framework and needs an entirely new political system. He said establishing a bicameral legislature could be a possibility, but cited a federal system as a way to bring peace to Lebanon.

¶15. (C) Comment: With regard to March 14 unity, we have noticed disturbing signals coming from Kataeb in recent weeks. In mid-October, Gemayel announced the names of five candidates Kataeb plans to run in the 2009 parliamentary elections, alluding to possible others. On November 14, Kataeb Vice President Selim Sayegh shared with Pol/Econ Chief a detailed power point presentation outlining Kataeb's strategy for winning the elections, and was unresponsive to her suggestions on how to meld the ideas with those of the March 14 Secretariat. Furthermore, Tashnaq leader Hagop Pakradunian told us on November 14 that his party was in

talks with Aoun, Michel Murr, and Kataeb regarding the elections in Metn, where the Murr/Tashnaq/Aoun alliance cost Kataeb the seat to replace assassinated MP Pierre Gemayel in the 2007 by-election. We will continue to promote the ideas of a unified message, unified list, and room for independent moderates to all March 14 leaders. End comment.

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